

## ***Phone Screening in Domestic Violence Cases***

### ***When an application contains a DV indicator<sup>1</sup>:***

1. Call the client. Make sure it is a safe time to talk.
  - a. If you don't connect with the client by phone send a speedy note asking the client to phone you about their application. Don't mention anything about domestic violence or abuse in the speedy note.
2. If you connect with the client over the phone and they indicate it is safe to talk, provide them with the phone number of their local DV service provider.
  - a. If in the course of the conversation they indicate they want to leave the domestic violence situation and they have children or are pregnant refer them to the closest full service branch.
3. Offer to send them a Safety Packet (DHS 8660) if the abuser is also an absent parent on the case.
4. Make a TRACS entry for domestic violence and/or good cause if it safe to narrate
5. If client indicates it is not safe to pursue support code good cause "B" on absent parent named as the abuser

### ***When you receive the call:***

- Identify need or problem
- Take Action
- If you can't take direct action, offer options so the caller knows what to do next

### ***Good listening skills:***

- Focus on what the person is saying or perhaps not saying
- Listen to the voice intonation
- Be nonjudgmental
- Show empathy
- Ask questions to clarify what the caller is saying
- Paraphrase what the caller said to check your understanding of what he or she needs

### ***Take action by making a referral:***

- Before making a referral find out if the person is currently working with any community partners or programs
- Ask if they have a pencil to write down the information

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<sup>1</sup> Taken from OHP processing center procedure.

- Explain the referral:
  - What services are available from the agency
  - What documents will the caller need to access services
  - What will happen once the person makes the contact (too many referrals may be confusing)
- Don't be afraid to take time to think about the referral. It's all right to tell the caller you'll do some research and call back, unless the safety of an individual is at stake

***Develop an action plan with the caller. An action plan lets the caller know what to do next and what to expect.***

- Is the caller able to contact the program?
- What information will the caller need to potentially access services?
- How will the individual get to the agency or service?
- Ask the caller if he or she has any questions. Then confirm that the caller has the correct information and understands the next steps to be taken.  
Never make specific promises regarding an agency's services.

**IMPORTANT: If you don't know the correct answer to a question, say so. Don't guess!**

### ***Closing the call:***

If call is simple, you can close by saying, "Call me if you need anything else." If the call is complex, be sure to summarize what was discussed. Make sure the caller knows what to do next.

If you need to follow-up, let the caller know when to expect your call.

### ***Crisis calls:***

A person can be in crisis for many reasons. In a crisis, the caller may feel unable to cope with the situation. The caller needs information, emotional support, and reassurance that he or she can handle the situation.

Keep in mind that the caller may be overwhelmed by emotion. The person may be feeling a combination of the following emotions:

- **Anger** – a common emotion which may be expressed overtly or covertly. The anger could be directed at another, turned inward, and if unresolved,

- may result in depression. An example would be when a caller refers to his or her spouse or others in a derogatory or sarcastic manner.
- **Helplessness** – manifests itself when an individual feels unable to cope and feels he/she has nowhere to turn. One example might be a caller who says he or she is not “strong enough” to leave.
  - **Anxiety** - a combination of worry and uncertainty. Anxiety is a normal response to challenging situations, but when it gets out of hand, anxiety can lead to confusion, questionable decisions, and self-defeating behaviors. It can immobilize a person. One example of extreme anxiety might be a caller who is considering leaving his or her spouse or partner. The caller could be so anxious about the enormity of what he or she needs to do that he or she may just do nothing.
  - **Lowered self-esteem** – the person doesn’t see himself or herself as competent. An example might be the caller remarking that he or she “has never been successful at anything”.

If the caller is overwhelmed by emotions, let him or her know that these feelings are a normal part of a challenging event and that it’s okay to have these feelings. Be sure to gauge the caller’s emotional state. You may have to calm her/him down before addressing the issue.

Remember also that the concept of crisis is relative. Maintain your objectivity and do not over-identify with the caller. Avoid telling the caller what to do. Offer options and resources. It’s the caller’s decision to take the action or not.

### ***Emergency calls:***

An emergency call is often a life-and-death situation involving a serious threat of injury or death. Immediately notify your manager, lead worker or other appropriate authorities (i.e. 911, security).

Be sensitive to the feelings involved and the facts of the situation. Remain calm and assure the caller that he/she will receive quick and competent assistance. The referral should be very specific.

One last tip is to deal with the caller, even though he or she may be talking about someone else involved in the situation.

### ***Suicide calls:***

- The tips for handling crisis and emergency call also apply to suicide calls. Take immediate action to inform the appropriate authority. If another person is in the office with you, give him or her a note to phone for help.

You should call the established emergency response numbers.

***Other crisis intervention tips are:***

- Always take the threat of suicide seriously
- Don't make promises that everything will be all right
- Get the person's name, location, and phone number in case he or she hangs up. In a DV situation, make sure that it's safe to contact him or her at the phone number or location.

**IMPORTANT: Be sure to get your managers guidance on this issue. Many offices have prescribed responses based upon local resource availability.**

***Dealing with Rumors:***

- Correct the information if you can
- Urge individuals to question the reliability of "unofficial information"
- Encourage people not to pass rumors. Pass official information only.
- Contact your manager for help in dispelling rumors.

***Confidentiality:***

- Honor client confidentiality
- Only share information on a need-to-know basis within agency guidelines.
- In domestic violence cases be aware the abuser may call hoping you will share private and confidential information. Notify you manager or lead worker if you believe this has occurred.
- In domestic violence situations, if the caller shares information that you must act on, such as a mandatory report of child abuse, let the client know that you must report the information. (The abuser may have made threats against the client or family if such information is reported and the client may need help to develop a plan to stay safe.)

***Some do's and don'ts:***

Do say:

- These are normal reactions.
- It is understandable that you feel this way.
- You are not crazy.
- It wasn't your fault, you did the best you could.

Don't say:

- It could have been worse
- It's best if you just stay busy.
- I know just how you feel.
- You need to get on with your life.

The human desire to try to fix the survivor's painful situation or make them feel better often underlies the preceding "Don't say" list. However, after hearing comments such as these, the survivor may feel discounted, not understood, or more alone. It is best when workers allow survivors their experiences, feelings and perspectives.